

*Today U.S. Congressman Sam Johnson (3rd Dist.-Texas) delivered the following closing statement on the floor of the House during the 36-hour debate on Iraq.*

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*to view Rep. Johnson make this inspiring plea for U.S. troops, or continue reading for the transcript.*

*A 29-year Air Force veteran, Johnson served in both the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Johnson spent nearly seven years as a Prisoner of War, more than half of that time in solitary confinement. Coincidentally, this week in 1973 as one of the longest held captives, Johnson finally left Hanoi on February 12, 1973, and returned home to Texas on February 17, 1973.*

*Earlier this week on Monday, Johnson spent the anniversary of his release with a House panel to accept his amendment to support and fully fund the troops for the 36 hours of debate on the troop escalation in Iraq.*

Johnson's floor statement follows:

"You know, I flew 62 combat missions in the Korean War and 25 missions in the Vietnam War before being shot down.

"I had the privilege of serving in the United States Air Force for 29 years, attending the prestigious National War College , and commanding two air bases, among other things.

"I mention these stories because I view the debate on the floor not just as a U.S. Congressman elected to serve the good people of the Third District in Texas, but also through the lens of a life-long fighter pilot, student of war, a combat warrior, a leader of men, and a Prisoner of War.

"Ironically, this week marks the anniversary that I started a new life - and my freedom from prison in Hanoi.

"I spent nearly seven years as a Prisoner of War in Vietnam, more than half of that time in solitary confinement. I flew out of Hanoi on February 12, 1973, with other long-held Prisoners of War - weighing just 140 pounds. And tomorrow - 34 years ago, I had my homecoming in Texas - a truly unspeakable blessing of freedom.

"While in solitary confinement, my captors kept me in leg stocks, like the pilgrims... for 72 days....

"As you can imagine, they had to carry me out of the stocks because I couldn't walk. The following day, they put me in leg irons... for 2 L years. That's when you have a tight metal cuff around each ankle - with a foot-long bar connecting the legs.

"I still have little feeling in my right arm and my right hand... and my body has never been the same since my nearly 2,500 days of captivity.

"But I will never let my physical wounds hold me back.

"Instead, I try to see the silver lining. I say that because in some way ... I'm living a dream...a hope I had for the future.

"From April 16, 1966 to February 12, 1973 - I prayed that I would return home to the loving embrace of my wife, Shirley, and my three kids, Bob, Gini, and Beverly ...

"And my fellow POWs and I clung to the hope of when - not if - we returned home.

"We would spend hours tapping on the adjoining cement walls about what we would do when we got home to America.

"We pledged to quit griping about the way the government was running the war in and do something about it... We decided that we would run for office and try to make a better place for all.

"So - little did I know back in my rat-infested 3 x 8 dark and filthy cell that 34 years after my departure from Hell on Earth... I would spend the anniversary of my release pleading for a House panel to back my measure to support and fully fund the troops in harm's way....and that just days later I would be on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives surrounded by distinguished veterans urging Congress to support our troops to the hilt.

"We POWs were still in when Washington cut the funding for . I know what it does to morale and mission success. Words can not fully describe the horrendous damage of the anti-American efforts against the war back home to the guys on the ground.

"Our captors would blare nasty recordings over the loud speaker of Americans protesting back home...tales of Americans spitting on veterans when they came home...and worse.

"We must never, ever let that happen again.

**"The pain inflicted by your country's indifference is tenfold that inflicted by your ruthless captors."**

"Our troops - and their families - want, need and deserve the full support of the country - and the Congress. Moms and dads watching the news need to know that the Congress will not leave their sons and daughters in harm's way without support.

"Since the President announced his new plan for last month, there has been steady progress. He changed the rules of engagement and removed political protections.

"There are reports we wounded the number two of Al Qaeda and killed his deputy. Yes, Al Qaeda operates in . It's alleged that top radical jihadist Al-Sadr has fled - maybe to . And 's closed its borders with and . The President changed course and offered a new plan ...we are making progress. We must seize the opportunity to move forward, not stifle future success.

"Debating non-binding resolutions aimed at earning political points only destroys morale, stymies success, and emboldens the enemy.

"The grim reality is that this House measure is the first step to cutting funding of the troops...Just ask John Murtha about his 'slow-bleed' plan that hamstringing our troops in harm's way.

"Now it's time to stand up for my friends who did not make it home - and those who fought and died in Iraq - so I can keep my promise that when we got home we would quit griping about the war and do something positive about it...and we must not allow this Congress to leave these troops like the Congress left us.

"Today, let my body serve as a brutal reminder that we must not repeat the mistakes of the past... instead learn from them.

"We must not cut funding for our troops. We must stick by them. We must support them all the way...To our troops we must remain...always faithful.

"God bless you and I salute you all. Thank you."

